



# Tourism development in UNESCO biosphere reserves: a typology of action

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## **Tourism development in UNESCO biosphere reserves: a typology of action**

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### **Summary**

Diversity of forms and governance logics in most UNESCO biosphere reserves reveals that a strong pragmatism leads to value natural and, more-over, non-natural (culture, heritage,...) local assets. This study tries to build a typology of strategies and governance logics used to process tourism development with seven study cases in France, Germany and Chili.

Key words: Tourism development, UNESCO biosphere reserves, legitimation of action, Boltanski & Thévenot, Europe, Chile, Germany, France

### **A-Biosphere Reserves**

Biosphere reserves are areas of terrestrial and coastal ecosystems which are solutions to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity and its sustainable use.

With today more than 500 biosphere reserves in one hundred countries, they are "Living laboratories" (Mousli, 2008) to develop integrated management of land, water and biodiversity.

Their goals are the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable development

The MAB program (Man and Biosphere) of the UNESCO has the aim to implement :

- the Agenda 21

- the Convention on Biological Diversity (especially the ecosystem approach)
- realize the objectives of the "Millennium Development Goals" (such as environmental sustainability) and the Decade "United Nations Education for Sustainable Development"

More widely, we need to question his goal of preserve and improve the environment.

In fact, UNESCO biosphere reserve responds to three basic functions:

- Conservation
- Sustainable development
- Logistical assistance to scientific investigation and education

They include three types of spaces:

- **A central area:** long-term protected, with the aim to conserve biodiversity, protection of landscapes, ecosystems and species it contains.
- **A transition area** surrounding the central area is designed to protect it from the disturbance. This sparingly populated area is designed to greet traditional activities or activities with low impact (hunting, fishing, sports, tourism, forestry, teaching and research).
- **A transition zone** where live most of the population and with major economic activities

## B- Complex social uses and action

A Biosphere reserve is a complex space because there's:

- a) A dual process of territorial ecological improvement based on both the spectacle of nature and also tourists' relationship with the place.
- b) The ambiguity of a situation in which an economical process combines diversified ethics and plural rationalities
- c) The environmental labeling means that quite large spaces are enacted in a foreclosure situation exclusive of any other uses (central area) or restricted (transition area; transition zone)

Then, this decision initiates a public debate which requires that local actors legitimate this option to their citizens to justify these constraints.

## C- Legitimate the action

The theory of “justification” by Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) gives elements to analyse; they say that public actors justify it by one of 8 models<sup>1</sup> to legitimate it

- 1 - The powerful and anthropocentric model
- 2 - The technocratic and rules model
- 3 - The educative civic model
- 4 - The marketing services model
- 5 - The business model with productive logic
- 6 – The traditionalist and conservative model
- 7 - The local development model
- 8 - The model based on “deep ecology”

I’ve studied the politics in 7 cases of touristic development: 6 UNESCO biosphere reserves in France, Germany and Chili and 2 UNESCO World heritage; in fact, Fontainebleau has the two labels. Most of the Boltanski and Thévenot categories are represented.

## D- Models of action

**1 – The civic and anthropocentric model** concerns great projects (often regional) where only prevails general (often national) interest; local environment and population are forgotten. The France of the 60’ and 70’, Tunisia of the 80’ are good models. If, sometimes, nature exists, it’s for the benefit of the full nation not for local population.

**2 - Technocratic and normative model:** it has the same logic but two differences:

- a-the political agent refers to an expert (often international) to justify his action.
- b- Nature become a material to legitimate other interests: it’s the case of the Unesco biosphere reserve of Mont Ventoux (real estate at regional scale).

**3 - Civic educator model** is very different with an ideological relation with nature; the goal of the action becomes to learn a new relation with nature: it’s only the case of the Unesco

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Corneloup J., Bouhaouala M., Vachée C., Soulé B., (2004) Formes de développement et positionnement touristique des espaces sportifs de nature, revue *Loisir et société*, vol. 24, n° 1, pp. 21-46

biosphere reserve of Camargue. Yet, it perfectly corresponds to the goals of the biosphere reserves.

**4- In the marketing services model**, connected here to **business model with productive logic**, the reserve of biosphere is an economic resource mixed with others. The marketing logic is dominant; the biosphere preservation theme's has a low capacity to orient the politics, except about economical valorization.

Near Berlin (UBR of Spreewald) the joint use of the Biosphere Reserve and a close Malaysian funding Tropical Island Resort is mainly a true business model.

**5- The traditionalist and conservative model** reveals an anti-action: the UNESCO label is used to help local powers to boost out of age social organizations. But different cases reveal two conservative use:

- In the franco-german biosphere reserve of Vosges du Nord-Pfälzerwald, this approach has the function to permit the adaptation of fragile spaces to a changing world.
- Close to Spain frontier, the Upper-Vallespir valley is a part of the Canigou mountain UNESCO world heritage; in this a social group try to stop the erosion of its domination.

Both cases reveal an indirect action of nature protection by «freezing» spaces (in the *Vosges du Nord-Pfälzerwald* reserve the landscape is promoted as historical heritage with a really sustainable use; in the Upper-Vallespir valley, hoteliers have politic powers and stop the development of other activities than spas.

**6- The local development model** shows or how local powers can value all opportunities and the context. This model permits to describe the opportunist ability to adapt to spatial contexts. The studied cases are peri-urban biosphere reserves; they are «rich», because many urban opportunities were long time developed here. Here, in the Unesco biosphere reserves of Gatinais Fontainebleau, near Paris or the Campana-Peñuelas reserve, in the mid-road from Santiago to Valparaiso, the two main chilian cities.

The use of UNESCO biosphere reserve or other label offers new opportunities: Fontainebleau detains also Unesco World heritage and 3 major French labels.

Here, the protection of nature is a hazard: it's already impossible to develop any activities on these very well protected spaces... Fontainebleau is one of the oldest protected natural spaces of the world since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But the biosphere label attracts thousands tourists more.

**7- « Deep ecology » model** reveals an ideological relation between society and nature: it must seek the perfection, the “pure” immersion in a *totally* preserve nature. Every dimension of life has to respect the fusion between man and nature. If it's impossible, the man must disappear from this space to let nature preserved.

It could be the hope of some members of the team in the biosphere reserve of Camargue but they need to accept a reality imposed, mainly economical, from outside of the reserve that limits this utopist dream.

| Models of justification  | Study cases   |
|--|---|
| <i>Civic models: the civic and anthropocentric model</i>                 | No study case here (ex. touristic planning of Languedoc French Coast during the 60')  |
| <i>Civic models: the technocratic and normative model</i>                | UBR of Mont Ventoux   |
| <i>Civic models: the model of the civic educator</i>                     | UBR of Camargue   |
| <i>The marketing services model</i>                                      | UBR of Spreewald (Germany)  |
| <i>Traditionalist and conservative model</i>                             | UBR Vosges du Nord-Pfälzerwald (France and Germany)<br>Upper Vallespir, part of "Grand site" heritage Canigou mountain (like UNESCO world heritage) |
| <i>Local development model or how to value opportunities and context</i> | UBR of Gatinais Fontainebleau (also UNESCO world heritage)<br>UBR Campana-Peñuelas in Chile   |
| <i>“Deep ecology” model</i>  | (partially) UBR of Camargue   |

|                        |                            |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Real protective action | Incident protective action |
|------------------------|----------------------------|

To conclude, the UNESCO biosphere reserves have the goal of preserve and improve the environment and nature. But, we can see that this purpose is rarely a priority: except on the Camargue biosphere reserve most, the studied cases aren't concerned by this aim, or it's an



indirect action. The economic logic is dominant and often a real success with only one exception: the Camargue biosphere reserve.

Beyond the apparent rigidity of the rules governing UNESCO biosphere reserves, touristic valorizations reveal a real freedom but, also, a lot of “greenwashing”...

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A full paper with complete description of each study case is in progress; publication by the end of June 2013

## *Personal presentation*

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I lead the master degree “Tourisme et Développement Durable des Territoires” (Tourism and Sustainable Development of Community Territories) at the University of Montpellier Paul Valéry (<http://www.univ-montp3.fr/beziers/masters/m2/m2tdtdt>).

I’m working on the norms and rules processes of production and adaptation to the global change (cultural, economical, social and environmental change) on tourism, leisure, heritage and culture.

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